

Court of Common Council



CITY OF HARTFORD
550 MAIN STREET
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06103

Written
3/25/13

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Cynthia R. Jennings, Councilwoman
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David MacDonald, Councilman

Testimony of Hartford City Council President Shawn T. Wooden **RE: Senate Bill 1146, An Act Concerning Cross Endorsements** March 25, 2013

Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, and Members of the GAE Committee:

Thank you for affording me this opportunity to address you regarding the issue of cross endorsement by minor parties. I am submitting this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 1146, An Act Concerning Cross Endorsements.

American democracy and our democratic process of empowering individuals to choose who will govern them is a model that nations of the world continue to emulate. Years before I first sought elected office, I served as the state director of the grassroots, nonpartisan voter registration group Project Vote. It has always been my passion to ensure that all voters have their voices heard, in all elections. Diversity and balance on the ballot is a crucial element of a vibrant democracy, and would not be possible without the work of minor parties.

It is no secret that voter turnout in low income neighborhoods and communities of color has historically been especially low. What I have witnessed firsthand, though, is that minor parties can invigorate and drive those communities to the polls.

While the two major parties focus and work on robust, multipoint platforms, minor parties often work on very specific issues. Whether the environment, jobs, or defense of the Constitution, minor parties hone in on issues that matter most to certain segments of the electorate. By allowing candidates of the major parties to be cross endorsed by minor parties, the minor parties serve as a clearinghouse, signaling to voters that their major party candidate has taken a stand on a specific issue. Polls have shown that this is important in communities that have generally shown a low interest in electoral politics. It is important that we take every step to get every

eligible voter involved in every election. Disallowing fusion voting in Connecticut is a step in the wrong direction.

Additionally, cross endorsement enhances our ability as elected officials to be responsive to our constituents. More than just a vote, a ballot cast on a minor party line includes a message to elected officials. It is a powerful way for a voter to tell his or her representatives, "Pay attention to this issue."

Minor parties make our democracy more vibrant. Cross endorsement makes us more responsive and accountable. These are tremendous tools. Not for party leaders and elected officials. Not for power brokers and professional politicians. They are tools for the voters. I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 1146, and to keep power in their hands.